

Perceptions Of Workers In A Mid-Western City Of Santa Catarina About The Reduction Of Working Hours

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Abstract:

Background: The reduction of working hours has been a widely debated topic in recent years, associated with workers' desire for better living conditions and a schedule that allows for more free time outside of work. This growing interest is based on the search for a balance between personal and professional life, the encouragement of productivity, and the promotion of workers' mental well-being. This study aims to analyze the perceptions of workers in Caçador, SC, regarding the reduction of working hours, focusing on variables related to well-being, productivity, and work-life balance. A qualitative approach with a descriptive and exploratory typology was used, along with a questionnaire. The research reveals that the responding workers view the reduction of working hours as beneficial for quality of life, although they acknowledge cultural and economic barriers. The association between shorter working hours and greater job satisfaction was highlighted, but the practical challenges of implementation still concern the participants. This study contributes to the debate on policies that promote healthier and more balanced work environments.

Materials and Methods: This article investigates the perceptions of workers in a city in midwestern Santa Catarina regarding the reduction of working hours. A qualitative approach was employed, as the data collected consists of respondents' perceptions, which were analyzed interpretatively.

Results: The research reveals that the responding workers view the reduction of working hours as beneficial for quality of life, although they acknowledge cultural and economic barriers. The association between shorter working hours and greater job satisfaction was highlighted, but the practical challenges of implementation still concern the participants. This study contributes to the debate on policies that promote healthier and more balanced work environments.

Conclusion: The research on reducing working hours in Caçador revealed that, although there is widespread recognition of the benefits of shorter working hours—both for mental health and work-life balance—the implementation of such practices faces significant challenges. Workers' perceptions indicate concerns about institutional and economic difficulties, as well as the impact on employer-employee relationships.

Key Word: Intrathecal; Bupivacaine; Buprenorphine; Nalbuphine; Postoperative analgesia.

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I. Introduction

The term "work" derives from the Latin *trāpaliare*, meaning to torture, and originates from the Latin *tripalium*, an ancient instrument used to shoe horses.² According to Torres and Pires²⁹, working is engaging in a productive activity that requires physical or mental effort. A significant portion of work is subordinate, in which an individual offers their labor, typically to a legal entity, in exchange for a salary.

As stated on the JusBrasil website¹³, employment relationships are a subset of the broader category of work relationships. This means every employment relationship is a work relationship; however, not all work relationships can be classified as employment relationships, as the latter require compliance with specific legal criteria.

Over the years, perceptions of working hours have evolved due to changes in labor laws. However, it remains a controversial topic, particularly concerning economic growth and job creation. Companies argue that flexible working hours are essential for retaining existing jobs and reducing unemployment in the wake of recurring economic crises since the 2000s.²⁹

The beginning of the Industrial Revolution, there were no restrictions on working hours. Concerns about the length of working hours only emerged in the modern era. After many years of exploitation, it became evident that limits on working hours were necessary to ensure workers had time for their family life, social engagements, and physical and mental health. Thus, limiting working hours is essential to uphold human dignity and the well-

being of workers, enabling them to balance their professional and personal lives. This balance benefits their health and enhances their social and family interactions²⁹

Reconciling work hours with family needs, school schedules, and social time is a critical issue when discussing the reduction of working hours.¹¹ From 1937 to 1988, there was a new adjustment to working hours. Under Article 7, Clause XII, the standard workday was defined as no more than eight hours daily and 44 hours weekly, allowing for time adjustments and reduced hours through agreements or collective labor contracts.²⁹

Finally, the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil established the current working hours: eight hours per day and 44 hours per week. However, some professions (such as bank workers, telephone operators, and teachers) are exempt from this 44-hour workweek due to the higher physical and mental strain involved. These exceptions are regulated by Articles 224, 225, 227, and 318 of the Consolidation of Labor Laws.²⁹

Currently, the standard workweek in Brazil is 44 hours, divided into eight-hour days. It is possible to reduce this schedule to 40 hours per week and gradually decrease it to a 36-hour workweek, with six-hour daily shifts for all workers. It is worth noting that such a reduction would not negatively impact employers or employees.²⁴

Various definitions of working hours exist: the actual time worked, excluding non-working periods; the time an employee is at the employer's disposal, beginning from when they start receiving instructions; the time from arrival at the workplace until departure; and the time spent commuting between home and work. The emergence of ways to extend working hours, such as overtime, compensatory time, and hour banking. In any of these cases, the extension limit is two hours per day, as stipulated in Article 59 of the Consolidation of Labor Laws. Regular working hours may be extended by up to two hours through written agreements between employer and employee or collective labor agreements.²⁹

Therefore, today's workday can reach up to 10 hours. Such a load raises significant concerns about workers' well-being. Today, flexible working hours are promoted as an organizational measure to reduce unemployment while providing benefits to employees.²⁹

That flexibility aims to serve as a mechanism for adapting to market changes in economic, political, and social aspects, acting as a tool to address current challenges.¹⁶ This measure would help reduce costs. For example, by hiring new workers or reducing overtime expenses. During periods of low production, companies could dismiss workers and require them to make up the hours on high-production days. In the current model, companies must retain workers during idle periods without deducting these hours from their pay. When production increases, companies must either pay for overtime or hire additional workers.²⁹

A company requires sufficient and skilled labor to produce its final product or service. When starting a business, it is known that profits or losses are part of the process, and companies must be prepared to operate according to market demands.²⁹ Regarding the legal definition of working time, it encompasses various aspects such as work periods, schedules, and rest breaks. It refers to the period during which an employee is at the employer's disposal, as outlined in the employment contract.²²

The treatment of working hours for employees under the "Green and Yellow" employment contract regime is very similar to that currently provided by the Brazilian Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT) for employees in general.⁵ In this regard, Article 8 of Provisional Measure No. 905 states:

Article 8: The duration of the daily work shift under the Green and Yellow Employment Contract may be extended by overtime, not exceeding two hours, as long as agreed upon through an individual agreement, collective agreement, or collective bargaining agreement.

§ 1: Overtime remuneration shall be at least fifty percent higher than the regular hourly rate.

§ 2: A work compensation regime may be adopted through an individual, tacit, or written agreement, provided compensation occurs within the same month.

§ 3: An hour bank may be established through a written individual agreement, provided compensation occurs within a maximum period of six months.

§ 4: In the event of termination of the Green and Yellow Employment Contract without full compensation of the overtime hours, the worker shall be entitled to payment for the uncompensated hours, calculated based on the remuneration owed at the date of termination.⁵

Uncertainties regarding the limits of CLT's subsidiary applicability to employees hired under the "Green and Yellow" regime. For instance, whether these employees could be subject to an annual hour bank through collective bargaining remains unclear. Over time, or with the possible conversion of the provisional measure, these questions might be answered. However, the prevailing interpretation suggests that where specific provisions address the issue (as with the hour bank), the subsidiary application of CLT would not apply. Thus, it is concluded that the annual hour bank does not apply to employees under this regime.²²

Quality of life pertains to the being, reflecting what a person embodies on an individual level, often involving cultural and social class issues.³ Quality of life is an inherently human notion, closely tied to the degree of satisfaction derived from family, romantic, social, and environmental life, as well as existential aesthetics.¹⁷

The concept of quality of life encompasses not only health-related factors, such as physical, functional, emotional, and mental well-being, but also other significant aspects of life, including work, family, friendships, and everyday circumstances. It is crucial to consider the personal perceptions of those being studied.²¹

Quality of life at work is understood as an approach involving people, work, and organizations, emphasizing two main aspects: concern for workers' well-being and organizational efficiency, as well as worker participation in decision-making and problem-solving within the workplace.¹⁰

Working hours have historically been a central topic in discussions about labor rights, workers' well-being, and work-life balance. Workplace well-being can be characterized by the prevalence of positive emotions at work and the perception that individuals express and develop their potential and skills in their jobs.⁹

According to Oliveira²⁰, working hours are a topic of significant historical, social, and economic importance that has been studied across various fields of knowledge. Since the Industrial Revolution, the nature of work and remuneration has changed significantly, profoundly influencing quality of life and social dynamics.

The current debate on reducing working hours aligns with the idea of decreasing the time a worker spends on their job. This does not imply working less but rather improving productivity within a shorter timeframe. Addressing reduced working hours requires understanding the realities and challenges of the modern labor market.¹

Reducing working hours involves decreasing the time spent on a salaried job characterized by subordination and heteronomy (i.e., work performed under an employer). The term "reduction of working hours" refers to reducing the time a worker dedicates to their job on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.¹⁸

Studies on reducing working hours have already been implemented in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, where 92% of participating companies decided to maintain reduced working hours. This experiment revealed that reduced hours did not decrease productivity and that employee turnover dropped by 57% during the trial period.²⁴

The Brazilian Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), Law No. 5,452, of May 1, 1943⁵, ensures: Article 468: In individual employment contracts, changes to the respective conditions are only lawful by mutual agreement, and even then, provided they do not directly or indirectly harm the employee, under penalty of nullity of the clause infringing this guarantee.

§ 1: The employer's determination for the employee to revert to their previously held position does not constitute a unilateral alteration.

§ 2: The change referred to in § 1 of this article, with or without just cause, does not guarantee the employee the right to maintain the corresponding bonus payment, which will not be incorporated regardless of the time spent exercising the respective function (added by Law No. 13,467, of 2017).

Given the presented scenario, this article addresses the following research problem: What are the perceptions of workers in a city in midwestern Santa Catarina regarding the reduction of working hours? The objective is to analyze the perceptions of these workers regarding the reduction of working hours. Achieving this objective requires the following research actions: a) Characterizing the city under study in economic terms; b) Describing the respondents' profiles; c) Analyzing the respondents' perceptions regarding the reduction of working hours; d) Diagnosing the scenario concerning working hour reductions.

This study is relevant as it addresses a central topic for workers' quality of life: working hours. The justification lies in investigating workers' perceptions of reduced working hours in midwestern Santa Catarina as a strategy for achieving work-life balance. The study aims to understand various aspects, including worker well-being, productivity, efficiency, and mental health. In summary, this research seeks to provide valuable insights for implementing policies that promote a healthy work-life balance, benefiting both workers and employers and contributing to overall well-being.

II. Material And Methods

This article investigates the perceptions of workers in a city in midwestern Santa Catarina regarding the reduction of working hours. A qualitative approach was employed, as the data collected consists of respondents' perceptions, which were analyzed interpretatively. The aim of qualitative research is to understand the multiplicity of meanings and senses that shape individuals' subjectivities in their relationship with society.²⁵

To achieve the first specific objective of the research, descriptive research was utilized. According to Bonho⁴, descriptive research serves various purposes, such as portraying the characteristics of relevant groups (e.g., consumers, sellers, organizations, and market areas); calculating the proportion of units in a specific population demonstrating certain behaviors; evaluating product characteristics; investigating the association between marketing variables; and making specific forecasts.

For the second and third objectives, exploratory research was adopted. Exploratory research is an attempt to establish the foundations for future studies or determine whether what is being observed can be explained by one of the existing theories.²⁸

The research universe is the city of Caçador in midwestern Santa Catarina. The population (or research universe) comprises the entirety of individuals sharing the same characteristics defined for a given study.²⁶

The sample represents a portion of the population or universe, selected according to a method or plan. The sample can be chosen using probabilistic or non-probabilistic methods.²⁶ In this study, a non-probabilistic sampling method was adopted, as the research was disseminated at the researcher’s convenience. A total of 101 responses were collected, of which 19 were excluded because the respondents were not residents of the analyzed city, and 11 were excluded because they were employers. After applying the exclusion criteria, 71 valid responses were analyzed.

The data used for analysis in this research are primary. Primary data refers to information collected for the first time through interviews and/or questionnaires with current or potential clients.⁴

Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire distributed via the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire was disseminated through the WhatsApp messaging app, with respondents encouraged to share it within their groups and for group members to share it further. Respondents were included based on the following criteria: a) Reside in Caçador, SC; b) Be employed; c) Not be an employer.

The parameterization used for data analysis was based on the Likert scale. The Likert scale consists of a set of items, each with a statement related to an attitude, object, opinion, attribute, or symbolic representation, among others.¹⁵ Respondents are asked to express their reaction by selecting one of five or seven points on the scale. In this study, the response options and parameterization are as follows:

- Strongly agree and agree – indicate a positive perception;
- Neither agree nor disagree – indicates neutrality;
- Strongly disagree and disagree – indicate a negative perception.

Thus, respondents selected one option according to their opinions.

III. Result

In 2022, the municipality of Caçador had a population of 73,720 people, with a population density of 74.96 inhabitants per km². Within the state, it ranked 20th in population size and 76th in density among 295 municipalities. Nationally, it was the 442nd most populous and 1,020th in population density among 5,570 municipalities.¹²

In 2021, the municipality had a GDP per capita of R\$ 58,773.87, ranking 62nd in the state and 679th in Brazil. In 2023, its gross revenues totaled R\$ 412.6 million, placing it 23rd in the state and 404th in the country. Total expenditures amounted to R\$ 408.9 million, ranking it 21st in the state and 401st in Brazil. External revenues accounted for 73.41% of current revenues, placing it 209th within the state and 4,436th nationally.¹²

The profile of the respondents reflects a diverse group of workers in Caçador, capturing the complexity of the local economy. Demographically, participants range in age, from young workers aged 18 to 30 to more experienced professionals over 40. All valid responses in this study are from individuals employed in the city of Caçador, SC. To better understand the demographic characteristics of this group, the respondents’ profile is presented in Table 1.

Table no 1: Respondents’ Profile.

Characteristic	Variables	Percentage
Ages	Less than 18 years	1.4%
	18 to 25 years	46.5%
	26 to 31 years	16.9%
	32 to 40 years	16.9%
	Over 40 years	18.3%
Gender	Male	45.1%
	Female	54.9%
	Prefer not to say	0%

Table 2 illustrates perceptions regarding the flexibilization of working hours.

Table no2: Perceptions Regarding the Flexibilization of Working Hours.

Perceptions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Limiting working hours is important to ensure workers’ well-being and health.	49.3%	33.8%	15.5%	1.4%	0%
Flexibilization of working hours can benefit both companies and workers.	53.5%	36.6%	7.0%	2.8%	0%

Flexibilization of working hours contributes to work-life balance.	56.3%	38.0%	4.2%	1.4%	0%
It is possible to reduce working hours to 36 hours without financial losses for employers and employees.	32.4%	38.0%	22.5%	7.0%	0%
Reducing working hours faces challenges and resistance.	39.4%	52.1%	5.6%	2.8%	0%
Reducing working hours would create more jobs.	36.6%	46.5%	12.7%	2.8%	1.4%
Flexibilization increases productivity, reduces overtime costs, and decreases absenteeism.	45.1%	39.4%	9.9%	4.2%	1.4%
Average	44.66%	40.63%	11.04%	3.2%	0.4%
Total	85.29%		11.04%	3.6%	

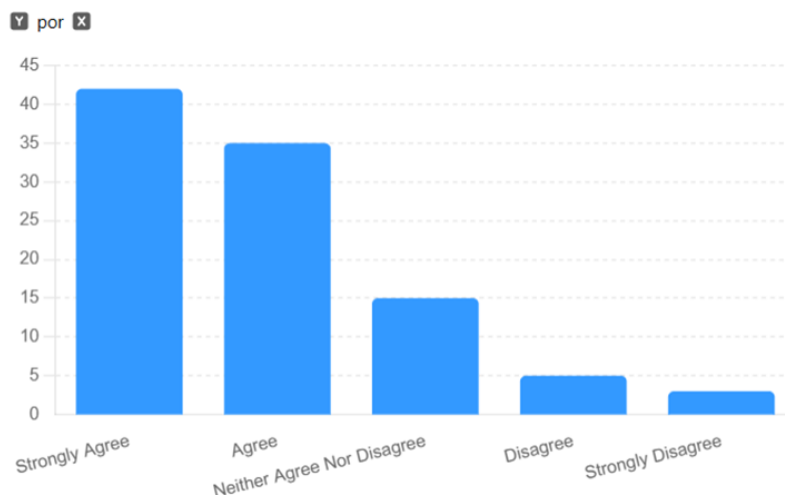
Table 3 presents respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of work on personal life, work-life balance, and views on the current workload.

Table no3: Work and Personal Life.

Perceptions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Work influences not only professional life but also personal, social, and financial future.	70.4%	23.9%	4.2%	1.4%	0%
Work is a complex activity, requiring different perspectives for a complete understanding.	40.8%	53.5%	5.6%	0%	0%
Work has a significant impact on quality of life, including physical and mental health.	62.0%	33.8%	4.2%	0%	0%
Balancing professional and personal life is essential to maintaining quality of life.	67.6%	28.2%	4.2%	0%	0%
Job satisfaction influences personal life and happiness.	60.6%	33.8%	4.2%	1.4%	0%
Reducing working hours would result in more jobs.	36.6%	46.5%	12.7%	2.8%	1.4%
Average	56.33%	36.62%	5.85%	1.69%	0.23%
Total	92.95%		5.85%	1.92%	

Finally, respondents were asked whether the current working hours are adequate and meet the needs of both workers and employers. The results of this question can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure no1: Opinions on the Current Working Hours



IV. Discussion

There is a concentration of respondents (46.5%) in the age group of 18 to 25 years, followed by 18.3% who are over 40 years old. Other age groups have smaller representations: 16.9% in both the 26 to 31 years old and 32 to 40 years old, and only 1.4% are under 18. This distribution highlights a predominance of young adults, with lower participation from teenagers and individuals over 40 years old. Regarding gender, there is a relatively balanced distribution, with a slight predominance of female respondents (54.9%), while 45.1% of respondents are male. None of the participants preferred not to disclose their gender.

The perceptions regarding the limitation of working hours reveal that 83.1% of participants agree or strongly agree that limiting working hours is essential for ensuring workers' well-being and health. This demonstrates a strong perception that controlled working hours protect quality of life at work. Quality of life is at risk for many individuals who spend most of their time at work, often facing stressful situations that lead to health problems. This is attributed to companies' high demands without providing a favorable environment for employee well-being and development.¹⁰

On the other hand, 15.5% of respondents neither agree nor disagree that limiting working hours benefits workers' well-being and health, possibly reflecting satisfaction with current working hours or uncertainty regarding changes. The questionnaire included an explanation of the Senate's guidance on reducing working hours; however, the lack of in-depth knowledge may have influenced these respondents to choose a neutral response.

According to 90.1% of respondents, flexibilization of working hours can benefit both companies and workers. This suggests widespread acceptance that adjusting working hours can generate mutual gains, balancing corporate and worker interests. However, 7% expressed uncertainty about the benefits of flexibilization, and 2.8% disagreed. As noted by Torres and Pires²⁹, companies may aim to generate and maintain jobs, but the majority will benefit from flexibilization as a cost-reduction measure. Labor laws must adapt to these working hour reforms to align with market economic realities.²⁹

A highly positive perception was observed regarding the impact of flexibilization on personal life. Approximately 94.3% of respondents agree or strongly agree that flexibilization contributes to better work-life balance, one of the most positive aspects highlighted in the study. Reducing working hours has been a growing topic of discussion, as workers advocate for better living conditions and schedules that allow for greater time outside the workplace. This reflects an increasing interest in achieving a healthier work-life balance, improved productivity, and enhanced mental health.²⁷

Perceptions about the feasibility of reducing the workweek to 36 hours without financial losses are more divided. While 70.4% agree or strongly agree, 22.5% remain neutral, and 7% disagree. This indicates some uncertainty regarding the possibility of such a reduction without financial repercussions. Neutral or negative perceptions may again reflect a lack of knowledge, trust, or confidence in implementing the change.

A significant 91.5% of participants agree that reducing working hours faces challenges and resistance, highlighting that, despite its predominantly positive perception, implementing such a measure could encounter cultural, economic, or structural barriers. Grazia¹¹ similarly notes that reducing working hours often faces implementation difficulties and resistance, particularly in reconciling the inherent relationships between time and labor.

Regarding job creation, 83.1% of respondents believe that reducing working hours could lead to more employment opportunities. This reinforces the idea that shorter work hours could create new job opportunities due to greater flexibility. However, Torres and Pires²⁹ caution that while employers might claim to create more jobs with shorter hours, this is not always the case. Often, new hires are for short-term needs, such as seasonal demand, rather than sustained employment. From the worker's perspective, a notable issue is the effect on salaries. If working hours decrease, wages are also likely to decrease, leading to economic imbalances in workers' lives.²⁹

Some respondents (9.9%) remained neutral about the advantages of flexibilization, while 5.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These perspectives contrast with the 84.5% who believe that flexibilization would yield benefits such as increased productivity, reduced overtime costs, and fewer absences. These findings align with Torres and Pires²⁹, who argue that flexibilization brings numerous benefits to organizational environments, including enhanced productivity, lower overtime expenses, and reduced absenteeism.

Overall, these data indicate a majority consensus (85.29%) in favor of flexibilizing working hours, particularly regarding promoting well-being and work-life balance. However, the feasibility of reducing working hours to 36 hours without financial losses remains uncertain for a significant portion of respondents, who generally express neutrality (11.04%) or disagreement (3.6%).

Work is fundamental to life, significantly influencing the past, present, and future of workers, particularly regarding the feasibility of a retirement plan that ensures a good quality of life—a widely debated topic. For each individual, the relationship with work is complex and unique. Moreover, work impacts personal and intimate life, public and social life, and causes changes in culture as well as political and legal relationships.⁷

Among the respondents, 70.4% strongly agree that work affects not only professional life but also personal, social, and financial aspects. Additionally, 23.9% agree with this statement, indicating that 94.3% of participants perceive work as playing a fundamental role beyond the professional environment. Only 4.2% remain neutral, and 1.4% disagree, reflecting a predominant perception of strong interdependence between professional and personal life.

Human work is a complex, multifaceted, and polysemous activity that not only allows but demands different perspectives for its understanding.¹⁹ The statement regarding the complexity of work received strong acceptance: 40.8% strongly agree, and 53.5% agree. This shows that 94.3% of respondents recognize the need to consider multiple perspectives to fully understand the demands and impact of work.

The limitation of working hours is justified by physical and mental fatigue and the need to dignify employees by offering them social and family time. It also serves as a mechanism to combat occupational diseases and workplace accidents.¹⁴ When asked about the impact of work on quality of life (physical and mental), 62% of respondents strongly agree, and 33.8% agree, totaling 95.8% who perceive a direct influence of work on health and quality of life.

Quality of life at work is often discussed, but job satisfaction cannot be dissociated from an individual's overall life.¹⁰ A total of 67.6% strongly agree, and 28.2% agree that balancing work and personal life is essential for quality of life. With 95.8% approval, this statement, like the previous one related to work and quality of life, generates a high level of consensus among participants.

Job satisfaction has proven to be the primary indicator of satisfaction with life and personal happiness. This satisfaction is more connected to personal fulfillment and the development of an identity in the workplace than to financial gains.³⁰ This is reflected in 60.6% of respondents who strongly agree and 33.8% who agree (a total of 94.4%) that job satisfaction directly influences personal happiness. Respondents clearly perceive the link between satisfaction in the professional environment and happiness in their personal lives.

A total of 36.6% of respondents strongly agree and 46.5% agree that reducing working hours could create more jobs, totaling 83.1% agreement. A significant portion, 12.7%, remains neutral, while 4.2% disagree or strongly disagree. These findings generally indicate optimism regarding the potential for job creation, albeit with some caution.

V. Conclusion

The research on reducing working hours in Caçador revealed that, although there is widespread recognition of the benefits of shorter working hours—both for mental health and work-life balance—the implementation of such practices faces significant challenges. Workers' perceptions indicate concerns about institutional and economic difficulties, as well as the impact on employer-employee relationships.

Limiting working hours is seen as an opportunity to improve workers' quality of life without necessarily compromising productivity. However, the research also suggests that such changes require cultural adaptation and more flexible labor policies to become viable.

The strong agreement (94.3%) regarding the contribution of flexibilization to work-life balance reinforces the urgency for more flexible work models that promote both business efficiency and workers' quality of life. Nonetheless, the economic feasibility of reducing working hours without financial losses remains a concern, as evidenced by 22.5% of respondents who remain neutral and 7% who disagree. This highlights the importance of further studies and a more informed approach to understanding the financial implications of such changes.

The positive perception that reducing working hours could create new jobs (83.1%) indicates optimism among participants regarding the redistribution of work. However, the cultural and economic resistance highlighted by 91.5% of respondents emphasizes that implementing changes faces significant barriers. The divided opinions on the adequacy of the current workweek, with 61.9% expressing negative views, support the need for revisions that consider both worker well-being and productivity.

In summary, this study emphasizes the importance of ongoing dialogue about working conditions and the need for policies that balance market demands with workers' health and well-being. Flexibilization of working hours, if well-planned and implemented, can be a beneficial solution for both workers and businesses, contributing to a healthier and more productive work environment. Implementing changes to working hours, whether through flexibilization or reduction, requires careful analysis of economic and social implications to balance the interests of all stakeholders and promote a more harmonious quality of life for workers.

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